

# ‘A Petty and Cruel Dictator’ Lies

National Review Online  
The Editorial

By The Editors

September 25, 2007

**W**hat’s worse, denying the Holocaust or denying the existence of gays? Judging by the reaction of the Columbia University audience for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s bizarre and dishonest performance Monday, it’s a close call, although his denial of the existence of homosexuals in Iran was starker than his call for more “study” of the Holocaust. Of course, the “study” he has in mind is that undertaken by the likes of the once-jailed Holocaust denier David Irving.

Perhaps stung by criticism of Ahmadinejad’s invitation, Columbia president Lee Bollinger smacked Ahmadinejad hard in his introduction. He said the Iranian president “exhibits all the signs of a petty and cruel dictator.” (Of course, that’s because he *is* a petty and cruel dictator.) Bollinger called him either “brazenly provocative or astonishingly uneducated” for questioning whether the Holocaust happened (how about all of the above, plus Jew-hating?), and doubted he would “have the intellectual courage to answer these questions.”

All of which raises the question why Bollinger invited such a man to his university in the first place. He told Ahmadinejad that “your avoiding [the questions] will have meaning for us.” As if there were any doubt that Ahmadinejad would avoid the questions. Ahmadinejad has zero interest in the kind of “academic” dialogue Bollinger envisioned, because he is driven by ideology and power. Bollinger succeeded only in giving him a prestigious platform, and one from which — amazingly enough — he frequently won applause. We hope that the approval this fanatic occasionally won Monday will be long remembered in the annals of academic infamy.

Ahmadinejad scolded Bollinger for his scathing introduction, and was interrupted by applause when he told him, “In Iran, we actually respect our speakers” (and take what they say so seriously, he might have added, that we jail some of them for it). He then lied about the Iranians’ being “friends of the Jewish people,” and dodged a yes-or-no question about whether he supports the destruction of Israel, saying he supports a referendum on the future of Israel in which the Palestinians would vote (a measure that would certainly mean the destruction of Israel). He lied about

supporting terrorism, maintaining, “We’re a cultured nation, we don’t need to resort to terrorism.” And he lied about Iran’s nuclear program, saying that the International Atomic Energy Agency “has verified” its nuclear program isn’t for the pursuit of a weapon.

Many of the students in the audience didn’t seem to mind being lied to, indeed seemed to enjoy it. When Ahmadinejad invited them all to Iran — where perhaps they too can be taken hostage or beaten — they applauded appreciatively. Overall, he probably got a warmer reception than John McCain at the New School a year ago.

A few Democrats denounced Ahmadinejad’s invitation to Columbia. But the party as a whole has been shockingly irresponsible on Iran. Democrats seem to regard it as simply George W. Bush’s problem. The Left howls almost every time U.S. officials point to Iranian nuclear deceit and Iranian-sponsored mayhem in Iraq; statements by U.S. officials seem to outrage them more than the Iranian acts themselves. But Iran is steadily marching toward a nuclear weapon, and killing Americans in Iraq. The latest reports are that the Iranians are shipping not just lethal explosively formed penetrators to Iraq, but also surface-to-air missiles, which would represent a dangerous escalation that we couldn’t afford to ignore.

Iran hopes to expel us from Iraq and weaken us in the region, to make way for the era of its nuclear-armed hegemony. This is a significant problem for the United States as a nation, and all our allies in the region (not just Israel, but the Arab countries too). Democrats are treating it with a shameful lack of seriousness, which might be one of the reasons that Ahmadinejad has seemed so jaunty the last few days.